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ABSTRACT

The Minnesota State Council on Vocational Technical Education offers four recommendations on the instructional program evaluation process. The first is addressed jointly to the State Board of Vocational Technical Education and the school boards administering Minnesota's technical institutes. It urges cooperative efforts to improve procedures and define roles and responsibilities relative to the execution of all phases of the evaluation process. The council speaks to the importance of having fully operational institutional research and planning functions in the technical institutes to address each phase more systematically. The second recommendation is addressed to school board members, who are urged to build upon the steps outlined in the first recommendation. The council suggests that they develop and employ strategies to ensure within each technical institute district a broad base of active participation in the evaluation process and a comprehensive understanding of each phase by all district participants. The third recommendation is addressed to the state board and focuses on concerns regarding on-site evaluators, namely their appointment, assignment, orientation, preparation, and compensation. In its fourth recommendation, the council suggests that the board clearly define the role of the state program specialists relative to the evaluation process and develop strategies to ensure the execution of their role and responsibilities. The appendix includes a report on the program evaluation process in Minnesota's technical institutes. (YLB)

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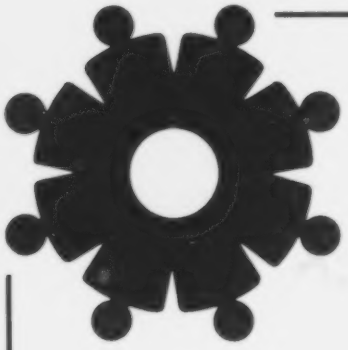

ENHANCING THE PROGRAM EVALUATION PROCESS IN MINNESOTA'S TECHNICAL INSTITUTES: FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS

December, 1986

State Council on Vocational Technical Education

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Introduction

The State Council on Vocational Technical Education offers four recommendations on the instructional program evaluation process used in Minnesota's technical institutes. In making these recommendations, the Council affirms the importance of ongoing assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of the programs and services offered in the technical institutes. It affirms also the equal importance of the responses to findings and recommendations that ensue from program assessments. Clearly, the responses must be appropriate and adequate to sustain strengths and correct weaknesses. This report reflects both the Council's support and concerns about the design and execution of the process.

The first recommendation is addressed jointly to the State Board of Vocational Technical Education and the school boards administering Minnesota's technical institutes. It urges cooperative efforts be taken to improve procedures and define roles and responsibilities relative to the execution of the self-evaluation, on-site evaluation, and response and implementation phases of the evaluation process. Furthermore, the Council speaks to the importance of having fully operational institutional research and planning functions in the technical institutes to address each phase of the evaluation process in a more systematic manner.

The second recommendation is addressed to the school boards administering Minnesota's technical institutes. The Council urges these boards to build upon the steps outlined in the first recommendation. The Council suggests that these boards develop and employ strategies to ensure within each technical institute district (a) a broad base of active participation in the evaluation process and (b) a comprehensive understanding of each phase of the process by all district participants.

The third recommendation is addressed to the Board. The Council's recommendation focuses on concerns regarding on-site evaluators, namely their appointment, assignment, orientation, preparation, and compensation.

In its fourth recommendation the Council suggests that the Board clearly define the role of the state program specialists relative to the evaluation process and develop strategies to ensure that they execute their role and responsibilities.

The Council is aware of the complexities of the evaluation process and does not suggest that the steps to improve it are necessarily easy to implement. These steps are, however, appropriate and attainable, given care, direction and commitment. It is especially important that the Board and the technical institute district boards approach the enhancement of the evaluation process constructively within the scope of their shared responsibility for the integrity of the programs and services in Minnesota's technical institutes.

The four recommendations are a package. Together they constitute a series of steps that complement and support each other. The Council's discussions of the recommendations may be repetitive in some instances. However, the repetition of themes and the restatement of concerns serves to underscore the relationships and complexities of the issues raised. Thus, the Council suggests that the Board and technical institute district boards not approach the implementation of these recommendations in a piecemeal fashion.

The four recommendations reflect the Council's understanding and deliberations on the information gathered in its study of participants in the on-site evaluations conducted at 15 of Minnesota's technical institute campuses during 1983-84 and 1984-85.[1] Furthermore, the recommendations reflect an understanding of the evaluation process obtained by the Council through knowledge gained in other settings, professional experiences, and observations.

The Council respectfully offers its services to the Board and the technical institute district boards for the implementation of these recommendations. The Council also requests the Board and the technical institute district boards to provide the Council with appropriate responses.

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[1]State of Minnesota, State Council on Vocational Technical Education. (1986). The program evaluation process in Minnesota's technical institutes: A study of the five year accreditation model. Minneapolis. A summary of the study is presented in the appendix to this report.

Recommendation One:

Regarding Evaluation Procedures, Professional Responsibilities,

and the Institutional Research Function in Minnesota's Technical Institutes

The State Council on Vocational Technical Education recommends that, cooperatively, the State Board of Vocational Technical Education and the school boards administering Minnesota's technical institutes

(a) review, refine, compile, and implement

(i) comprehensive procedures for the execution of the self-evaluation, on-site evaluation, and response and implementation phases of the evaluation process, and

(ii) definitions of the roles and responsibilities of all individuals and groups involved and affected by the evaluation process and the results it produces;

(b) review, refine, and augment the institutional research and planning function of the technical institutes to

(i) integrate specifically and deliberately the three phases of the evaluation process into the technical institutes' continuous, cyclical planning and renewal activities,

(ii) ensure that all participants share a common sense of purpose relative to each phase and to the evaluation process as a whole, and

(iii) monitor the execution of each phase of the evaluation process, with special attention given to the less public self-evaluation and response and implementation phases; and

(c) develop strategies and timelines to implement this recommendation.

Evaluation Procedures and Professional Responsibilities

It is incumbent upon the State Board of Vocational Technical Education to provide leadership and direction to sustain strengths and correct weaknesses of the programs and services offered by Minnesota's technical institutes. The process used by the Board to evaluate programs and services is a multifaceted accreditation model. On a recurring basis of approximately once every five years, the instructional, administrative, and support programs and services in each of the technical institutes are examined.

Three distinct phases constitute this evaluation process, namely (a) the technical institute's self-evaluation, (b) the Board's on-site evaluation of the technical institute, and (c) the responses to the findings and the implementations of the recommendations by the Board and the district board administering the technical institute.

The design and execution of each phase of the evaluation process should accomplish specific objectives as well as complement and enhance the objectives of the other two phases. Additionally, each phase must be appropriately administered for the overall process to be effective. Not only should the process produce accurate findings and appropriate recommendations, but it should also produce effective responses and implementation strategies.

The three phases collectively represent a comprehensive approach whereby the technical institute system strives to sustain excellence. This approach, with its complementary and sequential steps, requires assertive, coordinated execution. It requires, moreover, that the obligations shared by the Board and the district boards be exercised in a collaborative manner.

Against this background, the Council suggests the need for cooperation in the review, refinement, compilation, and implementation of comprehensive procedures for each phase of the evaluation process. Concurrently, the Council suggests the need for cooperation in the review, refinement, compilation, and establishment of definitions of the roles and responsibilities of individuals and groups, both at the state and district levels, who are involved and affected by the evaluation process and its results.

In calling for refinements in both procedures and responsibilities, the Council cites a lack of consistency as to how and who does what and when from one technical institute to another. Inconsistencies are evident at both the state and district levels and during each phase of the process.

A sampling of the Council's findings is illustrative:

* The self-evaluation may or may not be conducted by a technical institute in an open environment engaging a broad range of participants.

* The evaluation and consultation function of advisory committees may or may not be maximized during each phase of the evaluation process.

* Advisory committee members may or may not have direct contact with on-site evaluators and attend the exit interviews.

* Instructors may or may not attend the exit interviews or even be aware of the activity.

* Administrative strategies may or may not include instructors and advisory committee members in the response and implementation phase.

* On-site evaluators may or may not be provided with the background materials in advance of the on-site evaluation and subsequently advised of the disposition of their findings and recommendations.

* State program specialists may or may not be actively involved with the technical institutes during the response and implementation phase.

A clear, concise compilation of both procedures and responsibilities for each phase of the process would serve to inform all individuals and groups about the purpose and objectives of each phase separately, as well as the purpose and objectives of the evaluation process in its entirety.

Existing manuals for selected individuals and groups do not appear to address the larger need for the sharing of this essential information with all involved. The information available to the Council indicates that these informational needs are not met consistently, especially among instructors and program advisory committee members.

Except for technical institute directors, the Council finds that participants may have a fragmented and often parochial perspective of the process. Participants who lack a comprehensive perspective are neither equipped nor motivated to participate constructively in a process that lends itself readily to a technical institute's ongoing planning and renewal process.

The Council urges that a concerted effort be made by the Board and the district boards to refine and compile procedures and responsibilities because, in doing so, inconsistencies and gaps would most likely become apparent.

The self-evaluation phase is of concern for several reasons, one being the quality of the report it produces. Approximately 75 percent of the on-site evaluators who responded to the Council's survey indicated that they were not satisfied with the information in the self-evaluation reports and that they would like to have had additional information. The information desired may well have been in the report, and the evaluators failed to find it. If this were the case, the organization of the report and presentation of the information may need improvement.

The Council's findings suggest, however, that the Board's content guidelines for the self-evaluation report are not always consistently followed. The Council assumes that the purpose of the guidelines is to achieve a uniform and comprehensive information base on all of Minnesota's technical institutes. If

this assumption is correct and the guidelines are not consistently followed, the district boards should not transmit incomplete reports to the Board. If incomplete reports are transmitted to the Board, the Board should not accept them.

The response of the on-site evaluators to the Council's questionnaire raises the question as to whether they should be consulted on a regular basis regarding the guidelines for the content of the self-evaluation report. The report is their primary data base for conducting an on-site evaluation. Documentation specified by the on-site evaluators as being desirable included (a) information on instructors' experience and training, (b) student assessments of instructors and of the instruction provided, (c) reports on the nature of instructor-student relationships, and (d) instructors' references. These findings suggest that the Board needs to make the role of the on-site evaluators clearer to them. Further, the Board needs to review and determine what information is appropriate to make available to on-site evaluators.

The response and implementation phase also raises concerns. The allocation of funds and the availability of facilities largely shape the responses of the Board and the district boards to the evaluators' findings and recommendations. It appears that the Board and the technical institutes as a whole hold the recommendations to be valid. The technical institutes report that they implement nearly all recommendations and would implement most of the remainder if necessary funding and facilities were available.

The response and implementation phase of the evaluation process, however, has traditionally suffered from neglect, subsequent to the technical institutes' reaccreditation by the Board. In part, this appears to have resulted from the lack of established procedures and responsibilities which must be developed. Otherwise, the service desired by instructors from state program specialists during the interval between on-site evaluations may continue to be inconsistently provided.

Further, the expertise inherent in effective advisory committees at the technical institutes may also continue to be inconsistently targeted and maximized. Program integrity may suffer without the public support and advice of employer and employee representatives from the technical institutes' communities of interest. Moreover, program advisory committees--which constitute a pool of potential industry-evaluators--are not cultivated. The cultivation of industry-evaluators through active participation in program advisory committees is clearly in the interest of the technical institutes individually and collectively and of the state as a whole.

The Institutional Research and Planning Functions

A central element of the Council's recommendations relative to the evaluation process is to refine and augment the institutional research and planning

function of Minnesota's technical institutes.[2] Furthermore, the Council urges that specific and deliberate action be taken by the Board and the district boards to make the evaluation process--the self-evaluation, on-site evaluation, and response and implementation phases--an integral component of each technical institute's continuous cyclical planning and renewal activities.[3]

Overall, the evaluation process works, but it could be more effective. Improvements are not beyond the reach of the Board and the district boards. But attention, direction, and determination are required on the part of the Board and the district boards. Leadership and service opportunities are especially ripe in those instances where the environment needs (a) to nurture more assertively the institutional research and planning function, (b) to expand the base of active and constructive participation of staff and advisory committees in the technical institutes' planning and renewal activities, and (c) to create reasonable expectations of what the process should and can accomplish.

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[2]Institutional research represents the on-going formal assessment by a postsecondary educational institution of its programs, services, and activities, relative to its capacity to carry out its mission. It is research that has direct application to the institution's management and planning activities.

Institutional research in Minnesota's technical institutes includes organized inquiry that results in data to improve the decision-making process. Subjects for this inquiry usually include students, faculty, support services staff, administrators, program advisory committees, and the community. Examples of institutional research include cost benefit analysis, follow-up studies, community surveys, general data base analysis, and employers' surveys.

A research and planning officer in a two-year postsecondary institution is typically responsible for the following activities:

a. Coordinating institutional research and strategic and operational planning,
b. Interpreting and communicating planning strategies and institutional research findings to internal and external audiences,
c. Assisting in the development of new programs through occupational needs surveys, competency validation, and student evaluations,
d. Establishing systematic procedures for collecting and reporting institutional data to administrative and governmental units,
e. Completing questionnaires from external agencies,
f. Coordinating the institution's self-study process for the regional accrediting associations, and
g. Coordinating grant applications and negotiating contracts with funding agencies.

[3]The Council's findings suggest the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship of evaluation activities to other management and planning practices in Minnesota's technical institutes. Data relative to

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The Council specifically addressed the question of the duration of the on-site evaluation. Of the participants questioned by the Council, all but the directors suggested extending the time allotted to include an additional day. Directors, however, suggested that the administrative evaluation occur on a separate day. This suggestion appears reasonable.

Others, however, said that a one-day extension would allow program evaluators sufficient time to accomplish their required activities, which include observing programs, examining materials, and conducting interviews.

Instructors in the technical institutes generally said the recommendations formulated by the on-site evaluators were valid. However, many indicated that the recommendations were appropriate only in relationship to the time allotted for the on-site evaluations. They apparently assumed that more time for the evaluators would result in higher quality recommendations. The Council is not convinced that this assumption is valid. Rather, the Council believes that other factors contribute more to the appropriateness, usefulness, and quality of evaluators' findings and recommendations.

Concerns regarding on-site evaluators include their selection, preparation, experience, skills, assignment, and membership on a fully complemented evaluation team. Moreover, it is critical that the evaluators study the self-evaluation report prior to arriving on-site.

The quality of the self-evaluation report contributes to the appropriateness and usefulness of evaluators' findings and recommendations. The report should be accurate, timely, comprehensive, and readable with summaries of key points. It should also represent the compilation of information that evolves from an ongoing planning and renewal process.

The process should be open and have the participation of a broad range of affected individuals and groups. Their participation should, among other things, (a) broaden their perspective on their role and responsibilities for the technical institute, (b) give them an understanding of the overall

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the self-evaluation--the first phase of a recurring five year cycle--is instructive in this regard. In a number of instances, the self-evaluation report appears to be largely the product of ad hoc institutional research, instead of the product of a technical institute's organized, ongoing self-assessment and renewal activities. It appears that the preparation of the report is seen as an intrusion on the day-to-day operations in some technical institutes. The completed report is, moreover, viewed in some cases as being essentially a matter of compliance. One director's comment, that the technical institutes be permitted to begin their self-evaluations earlier in the evaluation process, further suggests the need for a more comprehensive understanding, as well as a more comprehensive framework, for institutional research and planning.

evaluation process, and (c) prepare them for constructive participation in the ensuing on-site evaluation and response and implementation phases.

Another key factor is the technical institute's openness in hosting the on-site evaluation. The administration should be sure that the staff, students, advisory committee members, and other participants are readily available for interviews with the on-site evaluators. The administration should also have supporting documents and other materials readily accessable for examination by on-site evaluators.

Recommendation Two:

Regarding a Broad Base of Participation and a Comprehensive Understanding of the Evaluation Process in Minnesota's Technical Institutes

The State Council on Vocational Technical Education recommends that the school boards administering Minnesota's technical institutes

(a) develop and institute strategies to promote more effective and substantive participation by instructors and support staff in each of the three phases of the evaluation process, including

  (i) a more central and active role in the self-evalation,

  (ii) attendance at exit interviews, and

  (iii) consultation on the review of findings and the implementation of recommendations;

(b) augment the participation of advisory committees in each of the three phases of the evaluation process, including

  (i) direct consultation and review of the program's self-evaluation,

  (ii) direct communication with on-site evaluators,

  (iii) attendance at exit interviews, and

  (iv) consultation on the review of findings and the implementation of recommendations; and

(c) develop strategies and timelines to implement this recommendation.

Promoting Staff Participation in the Evaluation Process

The school boards administering Minnesota's technical institutes, individually and collectively, have the opportunity to contribute significantly to enhancing the effectiveness of the overall evaluation process and, in turn, to guarantee the integrity of programs and services.

In the first recommendation in this report, directed to the Board and the technical institute district boards jointly, the Council outlines and discusses steps that it considers important to be undertaken cooperatively. However, in this present recommendation directed to the district boards, the Council focuses on steps that are clearly within the capacity of the district boards to implement through district policies. This recommendation, moreover, builds upon the first recommendation and is grounded in the principles of shared responsibility.

The essence of this recommendation to the district boards is that they should ensure within each technical institute district that (a) a broad base of active participation is central to the execution of the evaluation process and that (b) a comprehensive understanding of each phase of the process is shared by all district participants.

Responses to the Council's questionnaire indicate that instructors at some technical institutes are involved at less than optimal levels during all three phases of the evaluation process. Many described filling out forms as constituting their involvement and contribution to the self-evaluation. During the on-site evaluation, the degree of participation of instructors varies. While all instructors meet and speak with on-site evaluators, most do not attend the exit interviews at which the on-site evaluators report their findings and recommendations. During the response and implementation phase, the involvement of most instructors does not appear to be particularly significant either in developing responses to findings or in developing strategies to implement recommendations.

Disengaged as many instructors appear to be throughout the three phases of the evaluation process, it is not especially surprising that some express unrealistic expectations as to what the on-site evaluation should and can accomplish. Approximately one-third of the instructors expressed a lack of faith in the evaluation process to achieve the changes that they perceived as being important.

It is to the advantage of technical institutes to make much greater use of the evaluation process. Beginning with the self-evaluation, higher levels of staff participation can be elicited. The self-evaluation, integrated as part of an on-going local planning and renewal process, can be used to serve the interests of the technical institutes, at the same time that it is a phase of the Board's evaluation process. The same holds true for the other two phases of the process.

With the active involvement of its entire staff, the technical institute can assess its goals and objectives and its efforts to meet them. Moreover, the technical institute can establish priorities and develop strategies to achieve them. An open environment that encourages each participant to teach and learn from one another should be productive in preparing a knowledgeable staff to participate more responsibly in the on-site evaluation and response and implementation phases.

Augmenting Advisory Committee Participation in the Evaluation Process

The technical institutes could take significant strides in further developing and using their advisory committees in the evaluation process. Advisory committees, according to information available to the Council, had levels of participation in the evaluation process which were at least as low as those of instructors. Not only do most of the technical institutes need to develop a more open and constructive approach to the participation of their staffs in the evaluation process, but they also need to recognize the strength inherent in effective advisory committees. The participation of effective advisory committees as an integral element in strong programmatic and instructional efforts should be increased for each phase of the evaluation process.

To function effectively, advisory committee members must be educated by their respective districts in collaboration with the Board. Properly informed about their role in the instructional process, these committees can provide the technical institutes with ongoing review and advice. The recommendations of an effective advisory committee, if implemented, should be reflected in findings of on-site evaluators.

Furthermore, adequately educated and experienced advisory committee members form an essential pool of on-site evaluators for the Board. In preparing its advisory committee members to serve on evaluation teams at other technical institutes, a technical institute has immediate access to invaluable advice and makes a substantial contribution to sustaining the integrity of postsecondary vocational education in Minnesota.

Implementing Broader Participation in the Evaluation Process

Implementation of this recommendation will require varying degrees of reconceptualization of the nature and purpose of the evaluation process as an integral part of the local planning and renewal function. It will also require a similar reconceptualization of the role of staff and advisory committee members in the process. Implementation will require, moreover, the offering of more extensive orientation and informational sessions so that staff and advisory committees (a) are made aware of the ramifications and value of the evaluation process, (b) understand their roles and responsibilities, and (c) acquire and use the skills and tools necessary to execute their responsibilities effectively. It is essential that the Board provide the prerequisite leadership and direction to see that these things happen.

Recommendation Three:

Regarding On-site Evaluations

The State Council on Vocational Technical Education recommends that the State Board of Vocational Technical Education

(a) develop and implement standards and procedures for the recruitment, selection, assignment, performance review, and retention of on-site evaluators,

(b) ensure that a full complement of on-site evaluators and alternates are retained for each program,

(c) develop and offer a comprehensive education program for on-site evaluators,

(d) ensure that correspondence and other communications with on-site evaluators is complete and timely,

(e) give careful study to the restoration of honoraria to compensate on-site evaluators for their services, and

(f) develop strategies and timelines to implement this recommendation.

Standards and Procedures for the Recruitment, Selection, Assignment, Performance Review, and Retention of On-site Evaluators

The on-site evaluation of a technical institute is a public event. It openly demonstrates to the technical institute's community of interest the integrity of its programs and services. Few public or private institutions provide more information on their current operations, are judged more openly, and are subjected to more public and professional scrutiny.

The Board, in cooperation with the district board, conducts the on-site evaluation to validate the assessment made by the technical institute during its self-evaluation. Retained by the Board, volunteer educator-evaluators and industry-evaluators constitute the evaluation teams for the on-site visit.

The industry-evaluators are central to validating the assessment made by the technical institute during its self-evaluation. Together with the educator-evaluators, they are essential contributors to the objectivity, accuracy, and credibility of the findings and recommendations. The findings and recommendations of the evaluators are crucial, because they directly influence the effectiveness of the ensuing response and implementation phase.

As the Board and Council recognize, the importance of the role and responsibilities of the on-site evaluators suggests that their recruitment, selection, and assignment to on-site visits should not be taken lightly. Rather, the role and responsibilities require that standards and procedures be in place to ensure that qualified evaluators are obtained and that their assignments are appropriate, both in terms of their experience in the field and in the conduct of on-site evaluations.

Repeatedly, the state program specialists spoke in their questionnaire responses of the "time-consuming" recruitment process. The Council does not discount the time-consuming nature of the recruitment and selection process. Done well, the recruitment and selection of on-site evaluators is time well spent.

Information available to the Council underscores the need to spend time on recruitment, selection, and assignment. These were concerns expressed by technical institute directors and instructors about the background and experience--as well as the independence of judgment--of on-site evaluators with whom they have worked. Further, the Council notes the need to assign new evaluators to teams with experienced evaluators and to avoid pairing new evaluators on the same teams.

The Council notes also that on-site evaluators are often called upon to conduct evaluations at several sites during the school year and from year-to-year. The volunteerism of these evaluators is commendable, and their contributions to vocational technical education in Minnesota is to be applauded. The Council believes that both the evaluators and the technical institute system would be better served, however, through periodic reviews of the competencies and skills of evaluators.

Ensuring a Full Complement of On-site Evaluators and Alternates

An instructional program evaluation team is generally made up of three members: two industry-evaluators and one educator-evaluator. Information available to the Council shows that all too frequently one or more members are missing from an evaluation team. Occasionally, programs cannot be evaluated because no qualified evaluators are available.

The Council, in urging the Board to ensure the presence of full complements, weighed several choices. In doing so, it elected not to suggest that the size of evaluation teams be increased. Determining the number of evaluators necessary to constitute a full complement is more appropriately left to the

Board. The Council does suggest, however, that alternates be assigned for all evaluation teams so that vacancies do not create crisis situations during the on-site evaluation.

A Comprehensive Educational Program for On-site Evaluators

It appears that most, if not all, on-site evaluators could benefit from a more comprehensive, structured activity in which they (a) gain a commonly-shared sense of purpose of the evaluation process and their role and responsibilities for its successful execution, (b) learn the procedures and criteria upon which they are to conduct their evaluations, and (c) learn skills and techniques such as interviewing and data interpretation to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

The Council learned directly from the on-site evaluators participating in its study that educator-evaluators and industry-evaluators share neither a common sense of purpose relative to the on-site evaluation nor a common understanding of their responsibilities. Educator-evaluators described the evaluation process as being directed at determining a program's capacity to meet industry needs. Industry-evaluators, on the other hand, said that program improvement is the purpose of the evaluation and indicated as key components of their assessments criteria and program characteristics such as fiscal management, curricular and instructional quality, and facilities. It is important that all who participate in the on-site evaluation process have a common conception of its purpose. This is especially true for the on-site evaluators.

Currently, on-site evaluators experience a two-step preparation process. Approximately two to four weeks prior to the on-site evaluation they receive a package of materials to review. This package includes the self-evaluation report. Once the evaluators arrive at the site, they attend a brief orientation session on the first day of the evaluation and an even briefer session at the beginning of the second day. The data indicate that these efforts to prepare the evaluators are of minimal benefit. Subsequent to the beginning of the Council's study, the Board developed an instructional videotape for preparing on-site evaluators. The Board is to be commended for the development and use of this videotape which represents a significant step forward in educating on-site evaluators. The videotape is a promising beginning, but more extensive efforts to educate on-site evaluators must be made.

Ensuring Complete and Timely Communication with On-site Evaluators

There appear to be difficulties in regard to the timeliness and comprehensiveness of communications with the on-site evaluators. The difficulties underscore further the need for a more concerted effort to prepare on-site evaluators to perform their duties. There are indications that some of the operational activities the Board has delegated to the technical institutes are not being realized. Specifically, the Board has delegated responsibility to the technical institutes to send evaluators the materials they need to prepare

for the on-site evaluation. Furthermore, the technical institutes have the responsibility to contact the evaluators after the on-site evaluation to thank them for their service and to inform them periodically of the implementation and status of their recommendations.

The reports of a number of the evaluators lead the Council to conclude that some technical institutes are neither making nor maintaining these contacts with the evaluators. Evaluators frequently reported having problems obtaining their preparation materials. An even greater number of the evaluators responded that they had received neither official notification that their efforts were appreciated nor a report on the status of their recommendations.

Communication is a critical ingredient of any process, including the evaluation process. The data indicate that communication among evaluators, Board staff, and technical institute staff needs to improve. Evaluators need to receive their materials on time. Evaluators need to be able to communicate with all those involved in a program including students, instructors, administrators, advisory committee members, and others. Once an on-site evaluation has been concluded, the evaluators should receive communications thanking them for their services and informing them of the status and effects of their recommendations.

Honoraria for On-site Evaluators

The Council advises the Board to give careful study to the restoration of honoraria for on-site evaluators. It is a matter that generated considerable interest from participants in the Council's study. Previously, on-site evaluators were granted an honorarium of $100 per day for their services. The discontinuation of the honorarium was cited by questionnaire respondents as contributing to (a) the scarcity of on-site evaluators, (b) the underrepresentation of small businesses on evaluation teams, and (c) the recruitment of retirees who may no longer be as knowledgeable of the needs and practices of their respective industries as is deemed desirable in an evaluator.

Owners and workers in small businesses often cannot afford to leave their jobs for two or three days without compensation. In the case of one program cited in the study, all the potential evaluators were operators of individual proprietorships. They could not leave their businesses, which meant that one technical institute program lacked an evaluation altogether. This incident suggests that those programs most likely to address the needs of smaller enterprises are at a disadvantage. They may not be evaluated by industry-evaluators closest to the vocational education needs of these particular businesses. This is an issue for both new and established enterprises. Furthermore, to rely on the benevolence of the larger and more affluent enterprises and the generosity of individual employees who use vacation time to serve as an industry-evaluator without compensation raises the broad policy issue of differential influence on the goals and objectives of postsecondary education in Minnesota. Compensation for industry-evaluators might ensure equitable participation by all appropriate industries and businesses.

Recommendation Four:

Regarding the Role of State Program Specialists in the Evaluation Process

The State Council on Vocational Technical Education recommends that the State Board of Vocational Technical Education

(a) define clearly the role of the state program specialists in the technical institute evaluation process, and

(b) develop strategies and timelines to ensure that they execute their role and responsibilities.

The state program specialists are not currently involved in a technical institute's self-evaluation. They are, however, actively involved in the evaluation process, beginning with their efforts to identify and recruit potential on-site evaluators.

Until recently the state program specialists attended the on-site evaluation, observing and assisting Board and technical institute staff and evaluators. During the ensuing response and implementation phase, the state program specialists meet with technical institute directors and instructors to consult and facilitate the implementation of the evaluators' recommendations.

It appears that the role of the state program specialists in many of the evaluation activities is not clearly defined. Although the specialists recruit on-site evaluators and are involved in the response and implementation phase of the evaluation process, the precise nature of their involvement is not clear. In some cases, the specialists consider their role to be demeaning and not commensurate with their position, knowledge, or expertise.

Two other findings also require attention. In half of the cases, the specialists had not visited, or had visited only once, the programs which had been evaluated five years earlier. Moreover, records delineating the

evaluators' recommendations and the programs' progress toward implementation had been misplaced.

The findings to which the Board should perhaps pay greater attention are that (a) the tireless efforts of one state program specialist were cited by an on-site evaluator as the greatest strength of a critically-troubled program, and (b) the one improvement sought most by technical institute instructors is more assistance for their programs from the specialists during the response and implementation phase of the evaluation process.

Appendix

The Program Evaluation Process in Minnesota's Technical Institutes: A Study of the Five Year Accreditation Model

A Summary of Findings and Analysis

Purpose of the Study

The Council undertook this study in order to gain a better understanding of the process used by the State Board of Vocational and Technical Education to evaluate programs and implement recommendations in Minnesota's technical institutes. Thus, the purposes of the study are (a) to determine the overall strengths and weaknesses of the process and (b) to gather additional information upon which to base recommendations to the Board and other appropriate parties.

Significance of the Study

Both the Board and the Council have direct responsibility for and immediate interest in the conduct of program evaluations, relative to enhancing the capacity of the technical institutes to sustain program quality and meet Minnesota's labor market needs.

It is important that the design and implementation of the evaluation process produce (a) accurate findings, (b) appropriate recommendations, and (c) effective responses--not only by the Board and the technical institutes, but also by the Council.

The Council's responsibility to provide consultation in the establishment of program evaluation criteria represents only one facet of the Council's interest in the program evaluation process. Program strengths and weaknesses, as identified in evaluations, influence the Council's direction as it addresses its other obligations, including:

* Consultation on (a) policies the state should pursue to strengthen vocational education and (b) initiatives the private sector could undertake to assist in program modernization--particularly in reference to the evaluation's stated purpose to augment program improvement.

* Consultation on policies and practices on the conduct of vocational programs which emphasize the use of business concerns and labor organizations--especially in regard to the use of industry-based individuals as on-site program evaluators.

* Consultation on policies and practices to enhance the participation of local private sector interests in vocational education---especially to increase the effectiveness of program advisory committees.

* Consultation on the state plan, the state technical committees, and the availability of programs and services to Minnesotans--with special focus on program strength, modernization, and improvement.

The Five Year Accreditation Model

The Five Year Accreditation Model is a multifaceted process whereby the qualitative aspects of the instructional programs, as well as other programs and services in a technical institute, are examined on a recurring schedule of approximately once every five years. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide an information base for continued program improvement and institutional accreditation by the Board.

The Five Year Model is designed to be conducted in three phases. The first is the technical institute's self-evaluation which is conducted during the year prior to the on-site evaluation. The self-evaluation report is to provide an information base for the technical institute and the external educator-evaluators and industry-evaluators who conduct the on-site evaluation. The on-site evaluation occurs at a scheduled time during the school year and usually runs two days. Activities during the third phase include the system and institutional responses to the evaluators' findings and recommendations and the Board's actions relative to reaccreditation of the technical institute.

Design and Method

Council and Board cooperation in questionnaire design. The Council developed questionnaires to survey both private-sector and institutional participants in the evaluation process. The questionnaires reflected inquiries and concerns of both the Council and the Board. Council and Board staff collaborated in the development of the questionnaires.

A separate open-ended questionnaire was developed for each group of participants to determine their perspectives on the overall strengths and

weaknesses of the three phases that comprise the Five Year Accreditation Model. The questionnaires solicited suggestions on substance, form, and procedures to improve the process. The questionnaire for the Board's program specialists focused on the technical assistance, monitoring, and annual progress reporting tasks stated in their management objectives, especially as these tasks relate to the response and implementation phase of the program evaluation process.

One program in each of the seven vocational instructional areas was selected for administration of the survey for the technical institutes at which on-site evaluations were conducted during 1983-84 and 1984-85: (a) trade and industry: automobile mechanics, (b) business and office occupations: accounting, (c) agriculture: production agriculture, (d) distributive education: fashion merchandising, (e) health occupations: licensed practical nurse, (f) home economics and service: cosmetology, and (g) technical education: electronics.

During 1983-84 and 1984-85, on-site evaluations were conducted at 15 campuses, namely Albert Lea, Austin, Brainerd, Canby, Dakota County, Faribault, Hibbing, Hutchinson, Jackson, Mankato, Moorhead, 916, Pipestone, Thief River Falls, and Willmar. Not all of the seven instructional programs selected for the survey were offered at each technical institute evaluated during 1983-84 and 1984-85. However, 50 separate program evaluations are represented in the study. The overall response rate to the questionnaire was 41 percent.[4] Indicative of some of the deficiencies in executing the evaluation process is that some potential respondents asked to be excused from responding to the questionnaire because they felt they lacked the knowledge or experience necessary to answer the questions.

Survey participants and program selection. The groups of evaluation participants selected for inclusion in the study were (a) on-site evaluators, (b) campus and extension directors, (c) program supervisors and instructors, (d) industry-based members of general and program advisory committees, and (e) instructional program specialists in the Office of the State Director.

Discussion of the Data

Evaluators. Educator-evaluators and industry-evaluators were markedly different from each other on several accounts. Notable differences included (a) the number of experiences that they had as evaluators, (b) their perception and understanding of the purpose of the evaluation and their role in it, and (c) the degree to which they provided articulation and elaboration in their responses to the questionnaire.

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[4]Response rates by group were as follows: on-site evaluators, 47 percent; directors, 40 percent; instructors, 43 percent; program supervisors, 25 percent; advisory committee members, 10 percent; State Board program specialists, 100 percent.

Most educator-evaluators were, for lack of experience, limited to reflecting on their initial experience as evaluators in responding to the questionnaire. Industry-evaluators were, by comparison, veterans of several on-site evaluations. They also had extensive experience in industry, with 20 years being common. Only one-third of the industry-evaluators were first-time evaluators.

Industry-evaluators consistently provided answers of greater depth and detail than did the educator-evaluators. Illustration of the differences in articulation and elaboration of the answers provided by industry-evaluators is found in their descriptions of the purpose of the program evaluations in which they were engaged.

Educator-evaluators, using brief, cryptic answers, described the evaluation process as being directed at determining a program's capacity to meet industry needs. Industry-evaluators, on the other hand, in longer, more detailed statements suggested program improvement as being the purpose of the evaluation. Furthermore, industry-evaluators indicated criteria and program characteristics, such as fiscal management, curricular and instructional quality, and facilities, as key components of their assessments.

Responses of similar detail were offered regarding (a) the orientation and preparation of on-site evaluators, (b) the need for additional data and other information, (c) the exit interview process, (d) impressions of the response and implementation phase which follows the on-site evaluation, and (e) their sense of accomplishment in serving as evaluators.

Both educator-evaluators and industry-evaluators called for a formal, structured training process for evaluators, coordinated with a more timely distribution of documents and other materials needed by evaluators to prepare for the evaluation prior to arriving on-site. Industry-based evaluators called for additional industry-based evaluators and asked that first-time evaluators not be paired. Educator-evaluators suggested that first-time evaluators and trainer-evaluators be paired on-site.

Both educator-evaluators and industry-evaluators called for information on instructors usually found in a resume or vitae, i.e., education, training, and experience in industry and education. Industry-evaluators also sought information on student's attitudes, the nature of instructor-student interactions, and instructors' references.

The self-evaluation and exit interviews were perceived by evaluators as useful. However, they cited the need for a more positive and open approach by administrators at some campuses.

Evaluators were not consistently advised of the actions taken relative to their findings and recommendations. Yet both educator-evaluators and industry-evaluators were willing to serve again if asked. Industry-evaluators, especially, cited personal and professional benefits in serving as evaluators, including contributing to vocational education, acquiring new information, and expanding business and social networks.

State program specialists. The state program specialists indicated that they participate in the evaluation process without a clearly defined role. However, they indicated a desire to continue their participation, believing that it is mutually beneficial. They considered themselves capable of providing leadership and direction to the programs offered by the technical institutes. Furthermore, the specialists indicated that participation in the on-site evaluations is a learning experience for them, broadening their perspectives of the environment in which the technical institutes operate.

Nonetheless, the specialists disliked circumstances that hindered their providing service to the postsecondary programs. Cited most frequently were their lack of authority--compounded by operational practices of the Board's evaluation unit--and the time-consuming tasks of identifying on-site evaluators and filing the technical institutes' implementation plans.

The specialists reported that positive changes had occurred as a result of recent evaluation findings and recommendations in the areas of (a) staff selection and development, (b) curriculum, (c) facilities and equipment, (d) status and operation of local advisory committees, (e) relationships among programs and with local communities, and (f) attention given to student recruitment and job placement.

The specialists recommended changes to improve the process and their role in it. They suggested that the Board develop and implement an operations policy for each of the three phases of the evaluation process to increase consistency from one technical institute to another. Furthermore, the specialists urged that their role and that of other participants at each phase be clearly defined.

Additional recommendations called for the comprehensive training of potential on-site evaluators and the compensation of evaluators. The specialists also suggested that the Board (a) retain external evaluation consultants, (b) develop and use evaluation standards and certification criteria, and (c) directly test students in all of the technical institutes. On the whole, the specialists found the on-site evaluators to be qualified and their findings and recommendations to be appropriate.

Overall, the specialists stated that the Board needs a more consistent approach for the response and implementation phase. It was during this phase that the performance of the specialists was highly inconsistent.

Reporting on their activities during the response and implementation phase, the specialists differed greatly on several dimensions. They described different degrees of involvement and participation among themselves, demonstrating different frequencies of visitation to their respective programs. Two specific dimensions along which these differences occurred were (a) the specialists' monitoring and assisting the technical institutes and (b) their compilation and retention of records on the nature and status of evaluation findings and recommendations.

Instructors. The role of the instructors in the self-evaluation was passive and limited. On the whole, they thought that the recommendations of the

on-site evaluators were appropriate. They judged the evaluators to be qualified curriculum-content experts but not professional evaluators.

On the subject of being treated truthfully and fairly by the evaluators, the instructors differed. To some extent these responses appeared to be related to the amount of time that instructors interacted with the evaluators. Cultural and geographical differences, which the instructors perceived as distancing them from the evaluators, appear also to contribute to the instructors' perception of just treatment.

The interactions which occurred between the instructor and evaluators were usually informal. Rarely was an instructor included in a formal exit interview, the occasion on which the evaluators present their recommendations to the technical institute.

Three-quarters of the instructors reported that they told their program advisory committees of the evaluation findings and recommendations. However, instructors were not consistent in making constructive use of their committees in responding to the evaluators' findings and recommendations.

The instructors called for more training of the evaluators and for more evaluators. Some asked to be included in the exit interviews, while others appeared to be unaware that exit interviews were held.

The single improvement most sought by the instructors was increased participation of the state program specialists in working with the programs at the technical institutes during the response and implementation phase.

Campus and extension directors. The campus and extension directors generally agreed with the evaluators' findings and recommendations. Those recommendations led to changes in: (a) staff and curriculum, (b) student services, (c) administrative behavior and organization, (d) facilities and equipment, and (e) advisory committees.

As a result of their role in the process, the directors reported (a) developing an improved perspective of their institutions, (b) receiving a validation of the needs of the institution, and (c) demonstrating publicly the high level of quality of their programs. The principal problem was their inability to implement all the recommendations made by the evaluators.

The directors also described difficulties recruiting on-site evaluators with appropriate qualifications and experience. Approximately half of the directors specifically stated concerns about selecting on-site evaluators whose judgments could not be unduly influenced by instructors and other personnel.

Costs of the on-site evaluation were a concern of some directors. They spoke especially in terms of time consumed and the disruption of the technical institute's schedule for the on-site visits.

The directors stated the need for (a) authorizing their delegation of responsibility, (b) strengthening the self-evaluation phase, (c) lengthening the overall process, (d) increasing the size of on-site evaluation teams, and (e) scheduling longer interviews during the on-site evaluation.

Advisory committee members. Three advisory committee members responded to the questionnaire. Their responses contributed little toward understanding the self-evaluation phase and depicted very different experiences during the on-site evaluations. While accepting the evaluators' recommendations, they questioned the evaluators' priorities and understanding. Agreement seemed to exist that increased efforts for implementation should occur.

Analysis and Conclusion

Consideration of the data for each phase of the evaluation process was guided by three questions:

(a) How well does the process work?

(b) What aspects appear to work well?

(c) What aspects appear to need attention?

The first phase, during which a technical institute conducts its own self-evaluation, was principally the result of the actions of campus administrators. Although the self-evaluation was perceived as creditable, not all of a technical institute's staff were involved at an optimal level. For the on-site evaluation, there was general agreement that the evaluation teams offered valid and pertinent recommendations in spite of their differing conceptions of purpose and a low level of formal preparation. However, those recommendations, and the eventual responses of the technical institutes, could have benefited from the increased participation and more explicit responsibility of certain groups. It appears, for example, that attendance at the exit interview by instructors and advisory committee members could have increased their understanding of the on-site evaluators' concerns. Participation in the exit interview may be key to their constructive participation in the response and implementation phase.

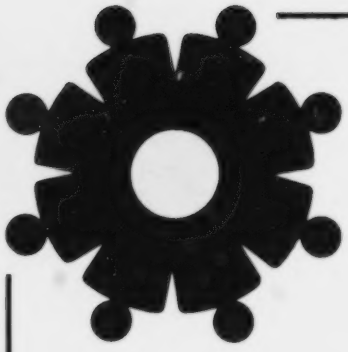
The development of the technical institutes' implementation plans was the result of a process which is not explicit or participatory. It appears that these plans are the result of the efforts of administrators, without extensive or meaningful consultation with instructors or advisory committee members.

The recognition of several areas of improvements in the evaluation process emerged from the study. In general, the procedures and responsibilities from all the phases of the evaluation process need to be made more explicit and participatory. Specifically, improvements need to be implemented that

(a) Increase the participation of instructional staff and advisory committee members in all three phases of the process,

(b) Define the roles and responsibilities of the Board's program specialists in the evaluation process, and

(c) Provide for improved and clarified standards of the recruitment, selection, and preparation of on-site evaluators.



THE ROLE OF THE STATE COUNCIL ON VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL EDUCATION

The State Council on Vocational Technical Education in Minnesota is a focal point for the collaboration of the private and public sectors to advance the quality of Minnesota's vocational programs and the system's responsiveness to the state's labor market needs.

Established under state and federal law, the Council is appointed by the Governor of Minnesota and is charged with various policy, consultative, advisory, evaluation, research, informational, reporting, and service responsibilities relative to vocational technical education in the state.

Responsibilities to the Governor, the Governing Boards, the business community, and the general public. The Council's responsibilities to the Governor, the State Board of Vocational Technical Education, the State Board of Education, the business community, and the general public include reporting and advising on:

* Policies Minnesota should pursue to strengthen vocational technical education, with particular attention to programs for the handicapped, and

* Initiatives and methods the private sector could undertake to assist in the modernization of vocational technical education programs.

Responsibilities to the Governor, the Governor's Job Training Council, the Governing Boards, the U.S. Secretary of Education and the U.S. Secretary of Labor. The Council's responsibilities to the Governor, the Governor's Job Training Council, and others, include:

* Evaluation of the vocational technical education program delivery systems assisted under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act and the Job Training Partnership Act in terms of their adequacy and effectiveness in achieving their respective purposes.

* Recommendations on the adequacy and effectiveness of the coordination that takes place between vocational technical education and the Job Training Partnership Act.

* Reports of the evaluation findings and ensuing recommendations.

Responsibilities to the Governing Boards. The Council's responsibilities to the State Board of Vocational Technical Education and the State Board of Education include:

* Consultation on the development of the state program plan and its subsequent amendments, during the period in which the plan is being developed.

* Reviews and comments on the state program plans.

* Consultation on the establishment of criteria for the evaluation of vocational technical education programs.

* Consultation on the establishment and operation of the state technical committees which advise the Council and Boards on the development of model curricula to meet Minnesota's labor market needs.

* Reports and recommendations on the distribution of all vocational technical education funds in Minnesota.

* Reports and recommendations on the financial assistance under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act, particularly the distribution of financial assistance between secondary and post-secondary vocational technical education programs.

* Reports and recommendations on the availability of vocational technical education programs, services and activities within Minnesota.

* Reports on the extent to which the following individuals are provided with equal access to quality vocational technical education programs:

  a. the handicapped
  b. the disadvantaged
  c. adults in need of training and retraining
  d. single parents
  e. homemakers
  f. participants in programs designed to eliminate sex bias and stereotyping in vocational technical education
  g. incarcerated criminal offenders

* Recommendations on policies and practices on the conduct of vocational technical education programs in Minnesota which emphasize the use of business concerns and labor organizations.

* Recommendations on procedures to ensure and enhance the participation of the public in the provision of vocational technical education at the local level within Minnesota, particularly the participation of local employers and local labor organizations.

The logo of the State Council on Vocational Technical Education is an abstract representation of the councilors sitting at a round table. Designed by a commercial art student enrolled at Alexandria Area Vocational Technical Institute, the logo was selected in 1982 from sixty-nine entries by a panel assembled from graphic arts, public relations and media enterprises. In making its recommendation, the panel emphasized that its selection was influenced by the strong Minnesota tradition of lay participation in the state's public education enterprises.

An equal opportunity/affirmative action agency.